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SUBJECT: KENYA & ETHIOPIA ENHANCE BORDER COOPERATION

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Note: This message was cleared with Embassy Addis Ababa.
End Note.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Kenya and Ethiopia are enhancing coordination at the local level in the border region to better manage cross-border security issues involving the Borana/Oromo and Gabra communities. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PolCouns met with Sheikh Abdinassir, a former International Visitor grantee, to discuss security issues in Kenya's Isiolo, Moyale and Marsabit districts bordering Ethiopia. Abdinassir is an influential Muslim cleric and scholar among Kenya's Borana ethnic group. The Borana make up about one percent of Kenya's population and about ten percent of Kenya's Muslims. They occupy about 20 percent of Kenyan territory in the dry, pastoralist and historically neglected north central part of the country. The Borana are closely related to Ethiopia's Oromo community. They are often in conflict with the Gabra over scarce resources. The Gabra and Borana are both pastoralists and are close socio-linguistic cousins. The Gabra, outnumbered by the Borana within Kenya, often call for reinforcements from their ethnic brethren in Ethiopia during times of conflict.

¶3. (SBU) Abdinassir related coordinated efforts by Ethiopian and Kenyan officials to dissuade Borana elders in Kenya from supporting Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) militants (an Ethiopian rebel group). Many Kenyan Borana traditional leaders attended a pastoralist conference in Yabelo, southern Ethiopia in April. At that conference, according to Abdinassir, Ethiopian Borana/Oromo leaders emphasized that significant new development resources were coming into their region negating the need for OLF militancy.

¶4. (SBU) These Kenyan Borana leaders told Abdinassir that they would attempt to rein in the OLF militants who take refuge in their villages on the Kenyan side of the border, but that they would not be able to disarm them. The leaders pointed out to Abdinassir that they have little or no control over armed fighters since they themselves are unarmed. A truce is the best they can manage.

¶5. (SBU) Abdinassir cited the Gabra-Borana blood feud as a second reason for the OLF fighters retaining their arms. Flare ups of fighting between these two communities often result in each community receiving reinforcements from their Ethiopian relations. OLF fighters in Kenya serve as village and livestock defense forces in Borana-land.

¶6. (SBU) Abdinassir also referred to a recent meeting in Embu, Kenya between Ethiopian and Kenyan provincial officials. (Embu is the provincial capital of Eastern province, which includes the Borana- and Gabra-inhabited districts of Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale.) Press reports identify the heads of the two delegations as acting Provincial Commissioner for Eastern Province David Jakaiti

for Kenya and Regional Administrator of the Borana Zone Abdulkadil Abdi for Ethiopia. According to Jakaiti, the officials sought to better coordinate efforts to prevent cross-border raids (Gabra versus Borana). Abdinasser insists that curbing OLF activity was also on the agenda.

¶7. (SBU) Kenyan provincial officials in Moyale complained to PolCouns in July 2006 about "hostile and uncooperative" Ethiopian provincial officials (reftel). PolCouns observed tense relations between Ethiopian and Kenyan border officials at Moyale at that time. Abdinassir mentioned that over the past six months, cooperation at the local level has much improved. The practical effect of improved relations at the local level is that Kenyan and Ethiopian residents of the border region are now able to use official crossing points to access markets and visit relations much more freely than in the past, no longer needing to cross at remote points to avoid unwelcoming officials.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The District Commissioner of Moyale quipped to PolCouns that relations between Nairobi and Addis Ababa are always closer than relations between Moyale, Kenya and Moyale, Ethiopia. It appears, however, that close coordination over the past several months between the two countries' foreign and security ministries on IGAD and Somali issues may be seeping down to local level officials to good effect.

RANNEBERGER